

## Sūrah Tahrim

### Central Theme and relationship with the Previous Sūrah

I have already indicated in the *tafsīr* of Sūrah Talāq, the previous *sūrah*, that both these *sūrahs* respectively teach us that in situations of both hate and love a person must obey the bounds set by God. Thus, the previous *sūrah* teaches us how these bounds must be respected in situations of hate. This *sūrah*, on the other hand, teaches us how these bounds should not be violated in situations of love.

Like hate, if a person is overcome by love, he becomes one-track minded. He becomes very insensitive and compromising to the bounds set by God in the matters of his loved ones. Even if he sees his wife and children openly deviating from the dictates of the *sharī'ah*, he either does not realize this deviation or ignores it deeming that they will slowly mend their ways. So much so, many people instead of checking and asking their relatives to refrain from their obvious excesses try to find excuses to hide these transgressions. This shortcoming is not merely found in the masses, it is also found in people who want to reform others by policing them allegedly on behalf of God. The reason for this attitude is that such people are not aware of the fact that it is not a requisite of their love towards a person that a compromising attitude be adopted in this regard and he be entrusted to the wrath of God; on the contrary, the true requisite of a person's love for someone is that in whatever manner possible he shield his loved one from the wrath of God even if he has to tolerate agonizing things for this purpose. He who forgoes the *sharī'ah*-flouting attitude of his loved ones is not in fact showing love to them; on the contrary, he is responsible for callously consigning them to the wrath of God without being aware of its consequences.

### Analysis of the Discourse

**Verses (1-5):** The Prophet (sws) has been checked by the Almighty in a particular matter. Though the driving force in this matter is showing mercy to the weak and consoling his wives, yet since he is to become an example for the whole *ummah* any virtuous deed which crosses the limits set by Allah is not permissible. The Prophet (sws) might be doing something to console and please his wives and he might be showing sympathy to their perfectly human weaknesses, yet owing to his position

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as a Prophet he must remain within the bounds set by Allah even in the smallest of affairs.

Similarly, the pious wives have been checked in a matter in which something said by the Prophet (sws) to a particular wife is disclosed by her to another wife, though in an atmosphere of mutual trust. However, since they too are to become an example for all women of the *ummah*, they are more responsible than others to be cautious about crossing the limits set by Allah even though the motive may be based on mutual trust and on desiring well for one another. A warning is sounded that the higher the position and status of a person, the higher the extent of his or her accountability.

**Verses (6-8):** After checking the Prophet (sws) and his wives, general Muslims are urged to continually check and restrain their near ones in order to save themselves from the punishment of the Hereafter. Everyone should remember that the angels who guard Hell are strict and stern. They shall show no lenience to any one. On the Day of Judgement, no excuse of a person will be acceptable, for he shall be facing only what he deserves and no one shall be punished for more than what he has done. Only those people will triumph on that Day whose pure repentance makes them eligible for the Almighty's blessings. It will be a Day of success for the Prophet (sws) and his Companions. The Almighty shall perfect their light which shall lead them to Paradise. Everyone else shall be doomed forever.

**Verses (9-12):** The Prophet (sws) has been emphatically directed to sternly tell the disbelievers and the hypocrites to change their attitude lest they end up in the raging fire of Hell which, of course, is the worst abode. At the end, examples of the wives of the Prophet Noah (sws) and the Prophet Lot (sws) are cited to the disbelievers and those of the wife of the Pharaoh and Mary (rta) to the believers; the purpose is to prove that only a person's faith and deeds will be of any benefit to him in the Hereafter. If these are not present, even being the wife of such great prophets as Noah (sws) and Lot (sws) will be of no benefit to these women in the Hereafter. Similarly, if these are present, a woman can deserve the highest reward in the Hereafter even though she may be the wife of a person as rebellious as the Pharaoh.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ لِمَ تُحَرِّمُ مَا أَحَلَّ اللَّهُ لَكَ تَبْتَغِي مَرْضَاتِ أَزْوَاجِكَ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ (١) قَدْ  
فَرَضَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ تَحِلَّةَ أَيْمَانِكُمْ وَاللَّهُ مَوْلَاكُمْ وَهُوَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ (٢) وَإِذْ أَسَرَّ النَّبِيُّ إِلَى  
بَعْضِ أَزْوَاجِهِ حَدِيثًا فَلَمَّا نَبَّأَتْ بِهِ وَأَظْهَرَهُ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ عَرَفَ بَعْضُهُ وَأَعْرَضَ عَنْ بَعْضٍ

فَلَمَّا نَبَّأَهَا بِهِ قَالَتْ مَنْ أَنْبَأَكَ هَذَا قَالَ نَبَّأَنِيَ الْعَلِيمُ الْخَبِيرُ (٣) إِنْ تَتُوبَا إِلَى اللَّهِ فَقَدْ صَغَتْ قُلُوبُكُمَا وَإِنْ تَظَاهَرَا عَلَيْهِ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ مَوْلَاهُ وَجِبْرِيلُ وَصَالِحُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ ظَهِيرٌ (٤) عَسَى رَبُّهُ إِنْ طَلَّقَكُنَّ أَنْ يُبَدِّلَهُ أَزْوَاجًا خَيْرًا مِّنْكَنَّ مُسْلِمَاتٍ مُّؤْمِنَاتٍ قَانِتَاتٍ تَائِبَاتٍ عَابِدَاتٍ سَائِحَاتٍ ثَيِّبَاتٍ وَأَبْكَارًا (٥) يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ عَلَيْهَا مَلَائِكَةٌ غِلَظٌ شِدَادٌ لَا يَعْصُونَ اللَّهَ مَا أَمَرَهُمْ وَيَفْعَلُونَ مَا يُؤْمَرُونَ (٦) يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَا تَعْتَذِرُوا الْيَوْمَ إِنَّمَا تُجْرُونَ مَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ (٧) يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ثُبُوبًا إِلَى اللَّهِ تَوْبَةً نَّصُوحًا عَسَى رَبُّكُمْ أَنْ يُكَفِّرَ عَنْكُمْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَيُدْخِلَكُمُ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ يَوْمَ لَا يُخْزِي اللَّهُ النَّبِيَّ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ نُورُهُمْ يَسْعَى بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَبِأَيْمَانِهِمْ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا أَتِمِّمْ لَنَا نُورَنَا وَاغْفِرْ لَنَا إِنَّكَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ (٨) يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ جَاهِدِ الْكُفَّارَ وَالْمُنَافِقِينَ وَاغْلُظْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَمَأْوَاهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ وَبِئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ (٩) ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا امْرَأةَ نُوحَ وَامْرَأةَ لُوطٍ كَانَتَا تَحْتَ عَبْدَيْنِ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا صَالِحِينَ فَخَانَتَاهُمَا فَلَمْ يُغْنِيَا عَنْهُمَا مِنَ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا وَقِيلَ ادْخُلَا النَّارَ مَعَ الدَّاهِلِينَ (١٠) وَضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا امْرَأةَ فِرْعَوْنَ إِذْ قَالَتْ رَبِّ ابْنِ لِي عِنْدَكَ بَيْتًا فِي الْجَنَّةِ وَنَجِّنِي مِنْ فِرْعَوْنَ وَعَمَلِهِ وَنَجِّنِي مِنَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ (١١) وَمَرْيَمَ ابْنَتْ عِمْرَانَ الَّتِي أَحْصَنَتْ فَرْجَهَا فَنَفَخْنَا فِيهِ مِنْ رُّوحِنَا وَصَدَّقْتَ بِكَلِمَاتِ رَبِّهَا وَكُتِبَ عَلَيْهَا وَقَانَتْ مِنَ الْفَاتِنِينَ (١٢)

In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Ever-Merciful.

O Prophet! Why do you prohibit that which God has made lawful for you to please your wives? And God is Forgiving and Merciful. And God has made it mandatory upon you to break oaths sworn in violation of the *sharī'ah*. And God is your Master and He is Omniscient and Wise. (1-2)

And when the Prophet confided a secret to one of his wives; so when she disclosed it and God informed the Prophet of this, he expressed some part of it and suppressed another. So when the Prophet informed his wife of this, she said: "Who informed you of this?" The Prophet replied: "I was informed by the Omniscient and the All-Knowing God." If you two turn to God in repentance, it is only befitting for you; your hearts are already inclined to God, and if you unite against him, God is his protector, and Gabriel, and all righteous Muslims and moreover the angels also are his helpers. It may well be that he divorce you; then His

Lord will give him in your place better wives than yourselves who are submissive, full of faith, obedient, penitent, devout in worship, abstinent, formerly-wedded and virgins. (3-5)

Believers! Protect yourselves and your kindred from the Fire –fuelled with men and stones – on which harsh and stern angels shall be deputed. They never disobey whatever God commands them and promptly do what they are directed to do. Disbelievers! Make no excuses today; you are only being returned what you had been doing. (6-7)

Believers! Turn to God in sincere repentance. Hopefully, your Lord will wipe away from you your sins and admit you to gardens watered by running streams. On the day when He will not disgrace the Prophet and those who professed faith with him. Their light will shine in front of them and on their right. They will pray: “Lord, perfect our light for us and forgive us; indeed, You have power over all things.” (8)

Prophet! Wage war against the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and deal sternly with them. And Hell is their abode and what an evil abode it is. (9)

God cites the example of Noah’s wife and Lot’s wife to the disbelievers. Both were married to two of Our righteous servants; then they betrayed them. So their husbands could in no way protect them from God and both women were ordered: “Go you also and enter the Fire with those who enter it.” (10)

And God cites the example of the Pharaoh’s wife for the believers when she prayed: “Lord, build me a house with You in Paradise and deliver me from Pharaoh and his deeds and deliver me from a wicked nation.” And cites the example of Mary, ‘Imrān’s daughter, who preserved her chastity. Thus into Her We breathed Our spirit and she attested the words of her Lord and His Books, and she was among the obedient. (11-12)

### Explanation

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ لِمَ تُحَرِّمُ مَا أَحَلَّ اللَّهُ لَكَ تَبْتَغِي مَرْضَاتَ أَزْوَاجِكَ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ<sup>١</sup>

It has been indicated in the introduction of the *sūrah* that it is not allowed for a person to be slack or compromising in fulfilling the rights of God when he is dealing with relations for which he has natural emotions of love and sympathy; in fact, it is a requisite of this love that a person be more cautious about the accountability of these relations so that there is a possibility that they may be reformed before being judged by God. And if they are not reformed, then at least a person will have fulfilled his responsibility before God of making the effort to reform them.

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1. O Prophet! Why do you prohibit that which God has made lawful for you to please your wives? And God is Forgiving and Merciful.

In order to delineate the above premise, the Almighty has first of all checked His Messenger for prohibiting upon himself a lawful thing merely to please and console his wives.

A little deliberation shows that no one can be more dear to God than His Messenger and his wives; however, in spite of this the Almighty has cautioned him for a very trivial error; moreover, the motive behind this excess committed was also very noble. The purpose of this chiding by the Almighty was that it becomes evident to everyone that even the Prophet (sws) and his wives cannot be allowed to cross the bounds set by God what to speak of other Muslims.

As far as the actual thing is concerned which the Prophet (sws) had forbidden upon himself to please his wives, various opinions have been reported by narrators. The most famous of these opinions is that the Prophet (sws) had consumed honey while residing with one of his wives; some of his other wives expressed their distaste for the smell of honey. It is known that there are types of honey which do not have a pleasing aroma; and even if such types of honey do not exist, people who are very sensitive to aromas do not like all kinds of aromas. Women in particular are very sensitive in this matter. At times, they do not like wholesome and tasty food. People have diverse temperaments. Some of the wives of the Prophet (sws) also did not like honey which had the scent of *maghāfir*<sup>2</sup> in it. Consequently, they expressed their revulsion for it before the Prophet (sws). Since the Prophet (sws) had a very subtle and refined disposition, and would be very caring towards the feelings and emotions of the weaker sex, he promised himself to never consume honey.

In normal circumstances, this was nothing extra-ordinary, and was a very pleasing step emanating from very pious motives; however, every step taken by a Prophet of God has great importance in religion; since every deed of his is to become an example for the *ummah*, it is not permissible for him to do or say something owing to his personal inclination and for the dearest of his associations that even slightly exceeds the bounds set by God. If this is allowed, there is a strong chance that it would become a wrong example for the whole *ummah*. It is known that the Jews had prohibited the meat of the camel upon themselves merely because Jacob (sws) would not eat it for some reason. Similarly, if it would have come to the knowledge of the Muslims that the Prophet (sws) had pledged never to eat honey, seldom would a pious Muslim also not have done the same thing. For this reason, the Almighty checked the Prophet (sws), and asked him to immediately mend the situation.

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2. This is the name of a special herb from which honey-bees extract honey; some people, however, do not like its scent.

The words *تَبْتَغِي مَرْضَاتِ أَزْوَاجِكَ* point to the motive of the step he took. It was essential to divulge this motive because as explained in the introduction, the objective of this *sūrah* is to teach Muslims not to show any slackness in the accountability of their dear ones. Like hatred, love also makes a person indifferent to the limits set by God. To inform a person of this danger, the Almighty has checked His Messenger and his wives – who are the closest to Him. In this way, Muslims will realize that there is no lenience in matters of religion for even the closest and the nearest.

Consider next the last part of the verse: *وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ*. Since the motive of the Prophet (sws) was very noble and he had made this decision out of sheer love and consideration for his wives purely for his own self and never wanted to prohibit something for the *ummah*, the Almighty after correcting him on this attitude simultaneously declared that He had forgiven him for this step.

Here it needs to be kept in consideration that there is an air of hastiness found in the declaration of forgiveness. It is as if even before delineating a directive of the *sharī'ah* an announcement of acquittal has been made. The obvious reason for this is that the Prophet (sws) did not take this step for the reason he had been rebuked; it was taken only for his own self, as indicated before, merely to sympathize with and gratify the weaker sex; the Almighty did check him so that this step of his should not create any problems for the believers; however, He simultaneously announced His forgiveness so that this rebuke should not weigh down heavily on the Prophet (sws).

Here readers should refresh in their minds what has often been stated in this *tafsīr*: the lapses by prophets of God are never because they are led by their base desires; they result because these prophets exceed the limits in doing something which in itself is noble. Pleasing one's wife is not an evil thing; it is, in fact, a requisite of decency, honour and benevolence and a requirement of human nature as well as of the *sharī'ah* revealed by the Almighty. The Qur'ān has directed man to fulfill this requirement on the condition that it remains within the bounds of the *sharī'ah*. If it exceeds these bounds, it becomes a source of trial for the Muslims from which one must protect one self as well as others. However, when the motive of a mistake is pious, it should be checked hand in hand with forgiveness.

قَدْ فَرَضَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ تَحِلَّةَ أَيْمَانِكُمْ وَاللَّهُ مَوْلَاكُمْ وَهُوَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ<sup>3</sup>(٢)

Stated in this verse is the directive relating to a person's oath sworn to

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3. And God has made it mandatory upon you to break oaths sworn in violation of the *sharī'ah*. And God is your Master and He is Omniscient and Wise.

forbid something lawful to him. The previous verse was addressed to the Prophet (sws) only. This verse is addressed to all the Muslims. The reason for this is that the real purpose of checking the Prophet (sws) on this mistake was that the *ummah* should not be misled in any way by this step taken by him. Consequently, in this verse, all Muslims are addressed and directed to break their oaths sworn in forbidding upon themselves what has been allowed by the *sharī'ah*.

Stated in the words **وَاللَّهُ مَوْلَاكُمْ** is the reason why God has prohibited this: Since God is the Master of people, only He has the right to tell them what is prohibited and what is not. No one else has this right on his part nor is it allowed to him to accept such a prerogative for others. If a person does such a thing, he will be interfering in the rights of God.

What is said above is further stressed by the words **وَهُوَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ**. Since in reality, only God is the knower of all things and is wise, hence whatever He has directed His servants to is based on knowledge and wisdom. No one should be so insane as to think that he is more knowledgeable and wiser than God.

Here a question arises: The Almighty has directed the Prophet (sws) and the believers to break such oaths; however, He has not mentioned any atonement for it; so, in this case, is no atonement to be made? The answer to this question is that the atonement of breaking an oath has already been mentioned in Sūrah Mā'idah (verse 89), and thus there was no need to repeat it here. Nevertheless, it is obvious from the words **تَحْلَةً أَيْمَانِكُمْ** that if a person has sworn an oath to prohibit something on himself, then he must atone for breaking such an oath; but if he has done so without swearing an oath, atonement is not necessary.

**وَإِذْ أَسْرَ النَّبِيُّ إِلَى بَعْضِ أَزْوَاجِهِ حَدِيثًا فَلَمَّا نَبَّأَتْ بِهِ وَأَظْهَرَهُ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ عَرَفَ بَعْضُهُ  
وَأَعْرَضَ عَنْ بَعْضٍ فَلَمَّا نَبَّأَهَا بِهِ قَالَتْ مَنْ أَنْبَاكَ هَذَا قَالَ نَبَّأَنِيَ الْعَلِيمُ الْخَبِيرُ<sup>4</sup>**

In the previous verse, the Prophet (sws) was checked on an act of his; in this verse, one of his wives has been checked on a mistake. When the Prophet (sws) confided some secret with her, she divulged it to another of his wives; when later the Prophet (sws) checked her on this, instead of showing regret, she regarded this to be against her self-esteem, and the wife to whom this secret had been revealed also did not like this. Finally,

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4. And when the Prophet confided a secret to one of his wives; so when she disclosed it and God informed the Prophet of this, he expressed some part of it and suppressed another. So when the Prophet informed his wife of this, she said: Who informed you of this? The Prophet replied: I was informed by the Omniscient and the All-Knowing God.

the Almighty admonished both these wives to show that in matters of religion even the wives of the Prophet (sws) are not beyond accountability.

Exegetes have generally linked the incident mentioned in this verse with that of the previous one, and in this manner given it a very despicable form. However, as per linguistic principles of Arabic, it is not necessary at all that the two incidents be regarded as the same; it is in fact more probable that the two be distinct: the Almighty checked one of the wives of the Prophet (sws) for a misdemeanour. Here, a linguistic principle should be kept in mind: by the words *وَإِنَّ* an independent incident is generally referred to.

Here the Qur'ān has not mentioned what secret was confided and with which of the wives was it confided. This secret has been kept a secret. For this reason, I do not deem it proper to go after this secret. Wives of the Prophet (sws) are like our mothers. It is not at all appropriate for the children to go after secrets which are between their fathers and mothers. This is so in particular when knowing this secret has no role in understanding this verse. Here, the admonishment relates to divulging a secret, and if we start investigating this secret, it would only mean that we are doing something from which we have been stopped. However, what is very evident from this verse is that the Prophet (sws) would confide with his wives which shows that he had full trust in their ability to keep secrets and in their intellect and wisdom as well. The beauty of husband-wife relationship rests on this trust. If this trust does not exist, then the two would be leading a life devoid of higher human values.

In the section: *فَلَمَّا نَبَّأَهَا بِهِ قَالَتْ مَنْ أَنْبَأَكَ هَذَا قَالَ نَبَّأَنِيَ الْعَلِيمُ الْخَبِيرُ* a part of the discourse has been suppressed as per contextual indications: the wife with whom the Prophet (sws) had confided revealed the secret to another of his wives. Just as the wife who made this mistake is not specified, similarly it is not indicated as to which of the wives she had revealed the secret; however, this much is evident that the matter remained among the wives; it was not revealed to any other person. The exegetes have generally named 'A%shah (rta) and Hafṣah (rta) in this regard. If this view is accepted, then it becomes evident that the relations between the two of them were so cordial that they did not hide secrets from one another. This view also refutes the reports in which some uncautious narrators have attributed jealousy and rivalry between them.

The Almighty informed the Prophet (sws) of his secret being disclosed; after that, the latter chided the wife who had committed this mistake. This was essential because secrecy has a great importance in husband-wife issues. It is essential for wives to protect the secrets of their husbands. The Qur'ān has specially mentioned that pious wives are those



who guard secrets: (الْغَيْبِ ٤: ٤٤) (so, pious women are obedient [to their husbands] and keep their secrets, (4:34)). A wife is the natural trustee of her husband's secrets. If she is unfaithful in this regard, then this will only mean that the very person who had been entrusted with the protection of his house has broken into it. This characteristic of faithfully guarding the secrets of the husband is essential for every wife; however, higher the rank the more the responsibility. This responsibility on the wives of the Prophet (sws) was much more than others; for this reason, the Prophet (sws), at the behest of God, checked them so that it becomes evident to everyone that no one is beyond accountability in matters which pertain to the bounds set by God.

The words عَرَفَ بَعْضُهُ وَأَعْرَضَ عَنْ بَعْضٍ refer to a very subtle reality: The Prophet (sws) did call one of his wives to account because it was a requisite of religion; however, he did not humiliate her in this process of accountability; he revealed a few facts, and ignored some others. This mannerism was adopted by him so that his wife is admonished at her behaviour and at the same time she does not end up dejected and disheartened. In the first place, the Prophet (sws) possessed a lot of affection and sympathy for others; he would not use harsh words to scold the hypocrites and his opponents. In the second place, this matter related to the wives of the Prophet (sws) about whom it could not have been imagined that any error that emanated from them was based on any planned ill-intention. Consequently, this mistake also, as indicated before, was not of this category; it only resulted because one of the wives thought that another of the wives was also a confidant and beloved of the Prophet (sws), and so there was no harm in sharing a secret with her and that this sharing would in fact increase mutual trust and love. This notion was based on a noble intention, and had no element of ill-intention in it. However, an important aspect was ignored in the matter: disclosing secrets is against the character which the Almighty wants to see in the wives of His Prophet (sws) as well as in the Prophet (sws) himself. It was essential that the wives possess this lofty character because they were to be idealized by all believing women of the *ummah*. Moreover, the matter related to the Prophet (sws) who was not merely a husband; he was also a messenger of God. Because of this importance that this issue had, those involved were checked on their behaviour but the manner in which this accountability took place was not to disgrace them; it rather took place in an indirect manner through various pointers. This method of checking yields the desired results in mistakes which are not made because of ill-intention.

Here, I would rather not touch upon the actual secret referred to in this

verse the way our exegetes have tried to unveil it. This is firstly because it is based on narratives which are in obvious contradiction to one another; secondly, this undertaking is also against the very teaching of the verse under discussion: when the Prophet (sws) himself did not like to divulge it completely, and the Almighty expressed His likeness for the manner adopted by the Prophet (sws), how then can it be the right course of action for others to try to go after the secret especially when it pertained to the Messenger of God and his wives.

The words *فَلَمَّا نَبَّأَهَا بِهِ قَالَتْ مَنْ أَنْبَأَكَ هَذَا قَالَ نَبَّأَنِيَ الْعَلِيمُ الْخَبِيرُ* express wonder and amazement of the wife who had divulged the secret; she did not deny the happening; however, instead of realizing her mistake, she was more interested in knowing how the Prophet (sws) was informed about it; she must have thought that the wife in whom she had confided must have told him; she had grounds to believe so because she had not disclosed this secret to any one else except her. It is even possible that she might have been angry at this situation, as is indicated by the words: *مَنْ أَنْبَأَكَ*. If this was the case, then there was a need to be surprised about it. If a person thinks that his or her trust has been breached, he obviously feels sad. However, the Prophet (sws) clarified her misconception immediately that he was informed by the Almighty who knows all and is Omniscient. This explanation by the Prophet (sws) must have cleared the doubts of his wife, which was essential. For this reason, the Prophet (sws) did not delay the explanation.

إِنْ تَتُوبَا إِلَى اللَّهِ فَقَدْ صَغَتْ قُلُوبُكُمَا وَإِنْ تَظَاهَرَا عَلَيْهِ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ مَوْلَاهُ وَجِبْرِيلُ وَصَالِحُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ ظَهِيرٌ<sup>5</sup> (٤)

Here the question arises that it was one of the wives who had committed this mistake; so why have both been addressed in this verse, and what was the mistake the other wife had committed on which she has been asked to repent for she was apparently innocent?

The answer to this question is that when the Prophet (sws) expressed his distaste on one of his wives for disclosing a secret, the other wife would have thought that this distaste was owing to the fact that the secret had been disclosed to her; she must have thought that after all the secret was revealed to her only and to no stranger; so why should the other wife

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5. If you two turn to God in repentance, it is only befitting for you; your hearts are already inclined to God, and if you unite against him, God is his protector, and Gabriel, and all righteous Muslims and moreover the angels also are his helpers.

be rebuked; this can only mean that she – to whom the secret had been divulged – has been considered an outsider. Although this notion of hers was based on an absolute misunderstanding, however when there exists a competition for trust and love, it is not improbable for such a misunderstanding to arise.

Nevertheless, both the wives regarded this matter to be against their self-esteem, and this feeling made them shy away a little from the Prophet (sws). In normal circumstances, this attitude was nothing extraordinary; such things happen every now and then between a husband and wife; however, the matter was between the Prophet (sws) and his wives; so the Almighty sternly checked those involved so that it becomes evident to the wives that in matters of religion expression of unjustified vanity has no place. If they were at fault, they were liable more than others to reform themselves. It was only this attitude which was befitting their rank and status, and also a requisite of their faith and repentance. However, if they became stubborn and united against the Prophet (sws) in this attitude, they should remember that a Messenger of God does not depend on them for his inner-satisfaction and resolve; it is, in fact, they who are dependent on him.

Here it needs to be kept in consideration that the attitude shown by these two wives was not driven by anger and hatred; it was driven by trust and love or in other words their confidence and conviction in him; however, the Qur'ān checked it with stern words. I have already indicated the reason for this in the introduction of this *sūrah*: the real teaching of this *sūrah* is that even where emotions are attached on the basis of fondness and love, it is essential to remain within the bounds stipulated by God and to fully abide by His injunctions. As a consequence of this, the wives of the Prophet (sws) should not merely regard him as their husband; they should also regard him to be a Messenger of God in all circumstances, and in all situations specially remember this status of his because this status overshadows all others.

Our exegetes have gravely faltered in interpreting the section of verse: *إِنْ تَتُوبَا إِلَى اللَّهِ فَقَدْ صَغَتْ قُلُوبُكُمَا*. In their opinion, the word *صَغَتْ* means “to deviate” and to them the translation of the verse is: “If you repent, then this is only befitting for you because your hearts have deviated.”

There are many errors in this interpretation – some of which are pointed out below:

Firstly, this interpretation is totally against the linguistic principles of Arabic. The word *صغو* does not mean “deviation” in Arabic; on the contrary, it means “to incline and to bend towards something.” My mentor, Imām Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī has researched into the meaning of this word in his *tafsīr* on Sūrah Taḥrīm. I am reproducing its relevant portion below:

In all languages of the world in general, and in Arabic in particular, there are certain words which besides having an aggregate meaning are also reserved for specific meanings. People who are not aware of this feature of a language are totally deprived of its understanding.<sup>6</sup>

After stating this principle, while citing an example of it, he writes:

For example, the word ميل, which means “to bend and to swerve” conforms to an aggregate meaning which is represented by many words in Arabic: For example: إرواء، إنحرا، زيع، جور. However, all these words mean ميل عن الشيء (to bend away from something or to leave something). Under this aggregate meaning are also words such as صغو which mean ميل إلى الشيء (to be inclined to or to bend towards something).

A scholar of Arabic who is aware of this essence of the word knows that the expression أَنَابَتْ قُلُوبُكُمَا means مالت إلى الله ورسوله (the hearts of both of you are inclined towards God and His Messenger) because the word صغو means “to bend to and to incline towards something” and not “to bend away and to swerve away from something.”

This essence of the word is also found in all its derived words (*mushtaqqāt*). For example, the expression صاغية الرجل means “to follow someone’s ways”. Similarly, the expression صغوه معك means “He is inclined towards you”. Another example is the expression: أَصْغَيْتَ إِلَى فُلَانٍ. It means “You turned your ears to him.” The words of a narrative are: يَنْفُخُ فِي الصُّورِ فَلَا يَسْمَعُ أَحَدٌ إِلَّا أَصْغَى إِلَيْهِ (when the trumpet is blown, everyone will turn his attention towards it), An idiom reads: الصِّبْيُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَصْغِي خَدِهِ (a child well recognizes his embrace of love). The *harrah* (cat) narrative has the words: كَانَ يَصْغِي لَهَا الْأَنْعَاءَ (they would bend the utensil towards it so that it could easily drink from it). The *jawf* (inner part) of a utensil is called صغو because everything gets accumulated in it.

Ibn Barī has presented the following couplet of some poet to adduce the meaning of إِصْغَاءُ سَمْعٍ (to direct one’s attention to someone):<sup>7</sup>

6. Farāhī, *Majmū‘ah tafāsīr*, 176-177.

7. Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-‘arab*, vol. 14, 461.

ترى السفیه به عن کل مکرمه

زیغ وفي إلى التشبيه إصغاء

(The foolish turns away from noble and honourable things and turns his attention towards silly things.)

A poet while praising a she-camel says:<sup>8</sup>

تصغى اذا شدّها بالکور جانحة

حتى اذا ما استوى فی غرزها تشب

(When he tightens the saddle on it, she turns her neck to become attentive, and when he puts his feet in the stirrup, she leaps forward.)

A‘shā while mentioning the eye of his bitch says:<sup>9</sup>

ترى عينها صغواء فی جنب غرزها

تراقب کفی والقطيع المحرما

(Her eye is bent towards its edge while she looks at my hand and brutal lash.)

Namr ibn Tawlab has used the idiom إصغاء أثناء in a specific connotation; however, even then the real essence of the word is found in it:<sup>10</sup>

وان ابن اخت القوم مصغى اناؤه

اذا لم يزاحم خاله

(And the rights of the nations’ nephew are violated, if he does not counter the onslaught of his uncles through a brave father.)<sup>11</sup>

After citing these idioms and couplets from the *Lisān al-‘arab*, Imām Farāhī writes with deep emotional feelings:

For the seekers of the truth, these testimonies should be enough; they

8. Ibid. vol, 14, 461.

9. Ibid., vol. 12, 126.

10. Ibid., vol. 4, 409.

11. Farāhī, *Majmū‘ah tafāsīr*, 177-178.

would be enough to satisfy them, and will not be influenced by the poisonous content injected by the fabricators in historical narratives; when such elements were not able to alter the words of the Book of God, they went after distorting its meanings and translated the word صغو as زغ (deviation) even though there is a world of difference between the two. The recital زاعت reported in certain narratives is not even worth paying attention to.<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, if the implied meaning was what the exegetes have interpreted: “if you repent because your hearts have deviated,” this style adopted by the Qur’ān is totally inappropriate. After citing numerous examples of the occurrence of قَدْ after the conditional إِنْ (as is the case in this verse) from the Qur’ān and classical Arabic poetry, Imām Farāhī has explained it thus:

If you reflect on these examples, you will realize that in this style the sentence which comes after قَدْ states the ease and comfort of what is stated after إِنْ. If the suppressions in the discourse are unfolded, it would read thus: “if such and such thing happens, then there is no problem or there is no wonder or this is something very ordinary because such and such thing has happened.” In the light of this detail, the verse would mean: “if, in order to please the Prophet (sws), you repent before God, then this is precisely what is expected from you, because your hearts are already inclined to Him.”<sup>13</sup>

Thirdly, the pious wives have been labelled with the sin of having warped and twisted hearts even though the nature of the incident, which I have described earlier in the light of the words of the Qur’ān clearly shows that there was not a semblance of any malafide intent involved and whatever happened, happened because of sincerity and mutual trust and affection: the Prophet (sws) confided a matter to one of the wives, who disclosed it to another of his wives out of sheer affection for her; when the Almighty informed the Prophet (sws) of this matter, he checked the wife who was guilty of this disclosure; however, she did not give due importance to this chiding of the Prophet (sws) and reckoned that if she had disclosed a matter relating to her husband to another of his trusted and beloved wives, then this was not a mistake that called for such accountability. Moreover, when because of this attitude, the Prophet (sws) became reserved with her, she too, owing to her love for him, was

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12. Ibid., 178.

13. Ibid., 179.

put off from him because of her trust in him and the wife to whom she had disclosed the secret also supported her. As referred to above, the two felt slightly humiliated that they had been rebuked for something that had been disclosed to them; it is but natural for such sentiments of self-esteem to arise in the wives of noble families.

Here one should also keep in consideration the psychological reality that when a person is angry because of his or her love for another person, then this anger is only superficial and concealed in it is an intense desire to be united again. Same was the case here. Both wives outwardly distanced themselves from the Prophet (sws), but in their hearts greatly desired that if the Prophet (sws) expressed even a slight inclination towards them, they would give up feigning anger. However, the Prophet (sws) could not show any flexibility in his stance because, as explained earlier, he was to teach his household that even with his near ones he must give priority to the directives of God and His Messenger. It was the wives who were left with no choice but to give up their unjustified self-esteem in this matter. However, the fetters of love and trust are very gripping. In spite of wanting something to happen that ended this embargo, they remained hesitant in taking the initiative. The Qur'ān has pointed to this internal conflict within them by the words *إِنْ تَتُوبَا إِلَى اللَّهِ فَقَدْ صَغَتْ قُلُوبُكُمَا* in a very effective way. Alas! Our exegetes were unable to understand this, and erroneously regarded this inclination of the hearts to be deviation of the hearts.

Consider now, the next part of the verse: *وَإِنْ تَظَاهَرَا عَلَيْهِ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ مَوْلَاهُ وَجِبْرِيلُ وَصَالِحُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ ظَهِيرٌ*. The word *تَظَاهَرَا* means “to become the helpers and supporters of one another. The preposition *عَلَى* after it has incorporated in it the meaning of uniting against the Prophet (sws). I have already explained earlier the nature of this “united front” and its cause: it was not an expression of clash; it was only an expression of trust and fond affection. They thought that in this matter they had a right to express their self-regard. At that time, they did not realize the fact that in matters of religion no one is beyond accountability, not even the Messenger of God.

Here it needs to be kept in mind that as per the more famed narratives, the two wives referred to here are ‘A%shah (rta) and Ḥafṣah (rta) about which we get an impression from some narratives recorded in *tafsīr* works that the two were jealous of one another in the way two rival wives normally are. However, their characters depicted in these verses clearly present an indubitable testimony that they so deeply loved one another that they would even share secrets about their husband, and at times, in sympathy for one another, would shy away from their husband.

Though the verse addresses only these two wives, yet the admonition

present in it relates to all the pious wives. They are told that if they shy away from the Prophet (sws), it is not that he would suffer from the loss of their company; the affection the Prophet (sws) has for them is secondary; His real association is with God Who is his Lord and Master. After Him, Gabriel, who brings revelations, is his friend and associate and after him the righteous among the believers occupy this position – believers who are the real worthy recipients of his attention and instruction. To add to this noble group are the angels of God who accompany and support him in every hardship.

The implication of this section of the verse is that the wives of the Prophet (sws), while dealing with him, must realize the great difference there was between an ordinary husband and that of a husband who was a Messenger of God. They should honour the time he was able to afford them from his hectic involvements, and should not think that as the Prophet (sws) was in need of their love and companionship would always pamper them; he would pamper them only to the extent possible in the limits set by God; if these limits were even slightly exceeded, it was his obligation to hold them accountable for this, and it would not be befitting for him to show any slackness in this duty.

عَسَىٰ رَبُّهُ إِن طَلَّقَكُنَّ أَنْ يُبَدِّلَهُ أَزْوَاجًا خَيْرًا مِّنْكَنَّ مُسْلِمَاتٍ مُّؤْمِنَاتٍ قَانِتَاتٍ  
تَائِبَاتٍ عَابِدَاتٍ سَاجِدَاتٍ تَيَّبَاتٍ وَأَبْكَارًا<sup>14</sup>

Expressed in this verse is the same topic as the previous verse, albeit in a more stern manner viz a viz the requirement of accountability. The pious wives are addressed and told that they should not think that if they shy away from the Prophet (sws), then he would be deprived of the support of close ones. Just as today the Almighty has selected them for his companionship, he can select better wives than them for this purpose if the Prophet (sws) divorces them, and these wives will have all the qualities they are required to have. The qualities enumerated here have all been discussed at other places in the Qur'ān specially in verse twenty five of Sūrah Aḥzāb. Readers are advised to look up the *tafsīr* of that verse. Its repetition here will only unnecessarily add more pages.

The real purpose of mentioning the word تَيَّبَاتٌ (formerly-wedded) after أَبْكَارًا (virgins) is that to God the real value of a person lies in his or her high moral character. Being formerly-wedded or being a virgin is a secondary thing. If a lady has a high moral character, then married ladies

14. It may well be that he divorce you; then His Lord will give him in your place better wives than yourselves who are submissive, full of faith, obedient, penitent, devout in worship, abstinent, formerly-wedded and virgins.



hold more importance than virgins, as is evident by their prior mention in the verse.

The word سَائِحَات has generally been translated as “fasting women”; in my opinion, this is an inaccurate translation. This actually refers to سياحة (*siyāhat*), a religious term which has a broad meaning. I have already mentioned in detail my research about this word in verse 112 of Sūrah Tawbah. Its essence is ascetism and forsaking worldly pleasures. Thus it refers to rituals which depict this, and include the fast, the *i'tikāf* and the *hajj* etc. It is in fact a ritual of worship of the category of monasticism (*rahbaniyyah*). Just as monasticism is acceptable in Islam to a particular extent, similarly *siyāhat* is also acceptable to a certain extent. The fast, no doubt, is an important ingredient of it; however, confining the translation of the word to it would thus be incorrect. I have translated this word as abstinent, which is relatively more comprehensive and includes all rituals which have this spirit. This of course includes the fast.

While reading this verse, it should be kept in mind that in it the wives of the Prophet (sws) have been called to account – wives whose piety and purity was indubitable, and wives who were superior to all women of the world. Such noble souls have been threatened divorce merely because they were slightly careless in a matter instructed by the Prophet (sws), and that too not because of any antagonism or arrogance but because of love and trust. One can only imagine from this the status accountability occupies in Islam. In other words, it is this accountability which is the basis of establishing ties and severing them: love which is devoid of accountability is not love; it is a bait thrown by Satan. The real beauty of the love of believers is that it is subservient to the limits set by God. In such matters, they are never careless about one another; in fact, the more they love a person, the more are they vigilant in their accountability because this is the requisite of true love. When they see that no place remains in the hearts for their words of counsel and affection, they feel no hesitation in breaking ties with them, because once the spiritual relationship is broken, material relationship occupies no significance in their eyes.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ عَلَيْهَا  
مَلَائِكَةٌ غِلَاطٌ شِدَادٌ لَا يَعْصُونَ اللَّهَ مَا أَمَرَهُمْ وَيَفْعَلُونَ مَا يُؤْمَرُونَ (٦)<sup>15</sup>

After the Prophet (sws) and his wives were called to account in the

15. Believers! Protect yourselves and your kindred from the Fire – fuelled with men and stones – on which harsh and stern angels shall be deputed. They never disobey whatever God commands them and promptly do what they are directed to do.

previous verses, the common believers are also cautioned and reminded. The message sounded to them is loud and clear: they have seen that even the Prophet (sws) and his wives are not beyond accountability, what to speak of others. It is the duty of every person to do whatever he can to protect himself and his family from fire. Whenever he sees any deviation on their part regarding the directives of God, he should try to check it as soon as possible; he should not worry whether this would weigh down heavily on them or not, and whether as a result of it, he might have to bear their displeasure and aversion. Bearing this displeasure is much less bothersome than letting them creep to the path that leads to Hell. If he is not vigilant in this regard, then he himself will also be held accountable for them, as per the narrative: (مسلم، رقم: ٤٧٢٤) أَلَا كُلُّكُمْ رَاعٍ وَكُلُّكُمْ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ (beware that each of you is a shepherd, and each person will be held accountable for his herd, (*Muslim*, No: 4724)).

The words وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ reflect the nature of the fire: its fuel is people and stones. With this fuel, it will blaze in its true form. The people referred to here are obviously those who did not purify themselves in this world, and remained contaminated with the filth of their sins. They never obeyed the *sharī'ah* revealed by the Almighty so that they could become purified souls.

The stones mentioned here, as has been explained in the twenty third verse of Sūrah Baqarah earlier, are ones which were given the status of deities and were worshipped in this world as such, and hence were a symbol of idolatry. It is to burn such objects that this fire of Hell has been prepared. When it will receive this fuel, it will be as if it received its most cherished food. It will gulp each and everything while declaring: هَلْ مِنْ مَزِيدٍ (50:30) (is there more?) and will do as is expressed thus: لَا تُبْقِي وَلَا تَذَرُ (٧٤:٢٧) (it will neither show mercy nor spare anyone, (74:28)).

The words عَلَيَّهَا مَلَائِكَةٌ غِلَاطٌ شِدَادٌ لَا يَعْصُونَ اللَّهَ مَا أَمَرَهُمْ وَيَفْعَلُونَ مَا يُؤْمَرُونَ are a veiled reference to people who regard checking their family members on the greatest of mistakes to be contrary to the love and affection they have for them. The implication of these words is that if today love is stopping people from holding their family accountable for faults, then they should remember that the angels deputed on Hell have no love and regard for such people; these angels are very harsh and stern; it is better that before they are encountered, people through accountability should try, if they can, to save their own selves as well as their family from the clasp of this punishment.

The implication of the part لَا يَعْصُونَ اللَّهَ مَا أَمَرَهُمْ وَيَفْعَلُونَ مَا يُؤْمَرُونَ is that if today people are being asked to do accountability, and this directive is

weighing heavily on them, then let it be so for it will not weigh down heavily on the keepers of Hell. They will never disobey God in any of His directives, and will fully comply to what He asks them to do.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَا تَعْتَذِرُوا الْيَوْمَ إِنَّمَا تُجْرُونَ مَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ (٧)<sup>16</sup>

If people will try to make any excuses on the Day of Judgment, they will be told that they are only reaping what they had sown. They will now taste the consequences of what they did in the previous world; it is not that the crimes of others have been inserted in their record of deeds; the result of their own deeds is being shown to them; so creating a clatter in this situation will be of no use to them; if they could have done something to save themselves from this punishment, it was in the previous world; they have no choice now.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا تَوْبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ تَوْبَةً نَّصُوحًا عَسَىٰ رَبُّكُمْ أَن يُكَفِّرَ عَنْكُمْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَيُدْخِلَكُم جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ يَوْمَ لَا يُخْزِي اللَّهُ النَّبِيَّ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ نُورُهُمْ يَسْعَىٰ بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَبِأَيْمَانِهِمْ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا أَتْمِمْ لَنَا نُورَنَا وَاعْفِرْ لَنَا إِنَّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ (٨)<sup>17</sup>

After the appeal sounded in the previous verse, in this verse all believers are called upon to repent on their sins and to turn to God in sincerity and shun their indifference to the truth.

Sincere repentance is that which is done with full humility of the heart and with true resolve and after which a person has no desire to turn towards sin, and after permanently divorcing sin, he earnestly presents himself before God.

I have already explained somewhere in this *tafsīr* that when the word تَابَ is addressed by God to His creation, then it connotes a promise and glad tidings from Him on the condition that a person proves himself worthy of these.

The word يَوْمَ in يُخْزِي اللَّهُ النَّبِيَّ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ can be regarded as the

16. Disbelievers! Make no excuses today; you are only being returned what you had been doing.

17. Believers! Turn to God in sincere repentance. Hopefully, your Lord will wipe away from you your sins and admit you to gardens watered by running streams. On the day when He will not disgrace the Prophet and those who professed faith with him. Their light will shine in front of them and on their right. They will pray: Lord, perfect our light for us and forgive us; indeed, You have power over all things.

locus (*ẓarf*) of the verb or some other verb can be regarded to be suppressed before it. On that Day, the Almighty will not humiliate the Prophet (sws) and his companions who were believers because they had already adopted those people as their own companions in the previous world whom they filtered out through the sieve of accountability and who had purified themselves from the filth of polytheism and disbelief, and were very sincere. These people will not be the ones who themselves led hypocritical lives, and because of their weak and compromising attitude led their family and other relations to hypocrisy. Such people will be humiliated on the Day of Judgement because on that day they will be engulfed by the darkness of their hypocrisy, while, on the other hand, the Prophet (sws) and his Companions (rta) would be advancing to their destination and their path would be lit up with the radiance of their faith and sincerity.

The last part of the verse: نُورُهُمْ يَسْعَى بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَبِأَيْمَانِهِمْ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا أَتْمِمْ لَنَا نُورَهُمْ يَسْعَى بَيْنَ نُورِنَا وَاعْفِرْ لَنَا إِنَّكَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ refers to the success and triumph of the Prophet (sws) and his Companions (rta). On that Day, everyone will be wandering in darkness; however, the Prophet (sws) and his Companions (rta) will be guided by a light which will be in front of them and on their right side, and they will be praying to God to perfect their light, and to forgive them because He has power over all things.

The light mentioned here is also referred to in Sūrah Ḥadīd earlier. There also people who will be humiliated are alluded to:

يَوْمَ تَرَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَسْعَى نُورُهُمْ بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَبِأَيْمَانِهِمْ بُشْرَاكُمُ الْيَوْمَ جَنَّاتٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ يَوْمَ يَقُولُ الْمُنَافِقُونَ وَالْمُنَافِقَاتُ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا انظُرُونَا نَقْتَبِسْ مِنْ نُورِكُمْ قِيلَ ارْجِعُوا وَرَاءَكُمْ فَالْتَمِسُوا نُورًا فَضُرِبَ بَيْنَهُم بِسُورٍ لَهُ بَابٌ بَاطِنُهُ فِيهِ الرَّحْمَةُ وَظَاهِرُهُ مِنْ قِبَلِهِ الْعَذَابُ يُنَادُونَهُمْ أَلَمْ نَكُنْ مَعَكُمْ قَالُوا بَلَى وَلَكِنَّكُمْ فَتَنْتُمْ أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَتَرَبَّصْتُمْ وَارْتَبْتُمْ وَغَرَّتْكُمُ الْأَمَانِيُّ حَتَّى جَاءَ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ وَغَرَّكُمْ بِاللَّهِ الْغُرُورُ (٥٧: ١٢-١٤)

On the Day when you shall see believing men and believing women, with their light shining before them and on their right. They would be given the glad tidings: “Rejoice this day for you shall enter gardens watered by running streams in which you shall abide for ever.” This is the supreme success. On the day when hypocrites, both men and women, will say to the believers: “Please give us that chance to benefit from your light.” But they will be told: “Go back,

and seek some other light there!” Then a wall with a gate shall be set before them. Inside it shall be mercy, and outside it will be torment. These hypocrites will cry out to them: “Were we not with you?” “Yes,” they will reply, “but you tempted yourselves, you waited, you doubted, and were deceived by desires until the decision of God arrived and Satan deceived you about God.” (57:12-14)

The words رَبَّنَا أَنْتُمْ لَنَا نُورًا وَاعْفِرْ لَنَا إِنَّكَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ refer to the fact that light shall be shown to these people before they enter Paradise in order to guide them to it. At that time, there will be darkness around them except on their front and on their right. For this reason, these people while showing deep gratitude on this favour of the Almighty will pray to Him to complete their light, and to forgive them. Obviously, when they will be given the light to guide them on while they would be treading the path leading to Paradise, this will also induce in them the expectation that the Almighty will bless them with His forgiveness, and that will be the time when this light will completely manifest itself. Thus, they will pray that this expectation of theirs is fulfilled.

The words إِنَّكَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ uttered by these people will be an expression of the fact that though they did believe that God had power over all things, they had now seen this with their very eyes that this is indeed so.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ جَاهِدِ الْكُفَّارَ وَالْمُنَافِقِينَ وَاغْلُظْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَمَأْوَاهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ وَبِئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ<sup>18</sup> (٩)

After the accountability of the believers and the near ones, the Prophet (sws) here is stressed upon to be vigilant in this divinely-bestowed responsibility of accountability. The *jihād* mentioned in the verse relates both to the sword and the tongue; however, both have their own sphere. The sword was to be used against people to whom the truth had been communicated in such a conclusive manner that they were left with no excuse to deny it, and had come out as its open enemies. Details of this *jihād* can be seen in the previous *sūrah*s. On the other hand, people who seemingly claimed to profess faith but evaded its requisites were to face verbal accountability. At this juncture, the tone of this accountability was not to be soft; it was directed to be carried out in a stern manner.

The reason because of which the Prophet (sws) had been asked to be stern is that whenever he would check the hypocrites on their mistakes, he would be very soft because of his graciousness so that they did not

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18. Prophet! Wage war against the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and deal sternly with them. And Hell is their abode and what an evil abode it is.

feel humiliated. These people should have valued this gracious attitude of the Prophet (sws); however, since they did not deserve this graciousness, instead of benefitting from it they became audacious enough to think that they were succeeding in deceiving the Prophet (sws). For this reason, the Almighty directed him to change his tone, and asked him to be stern and unyielding in calling them to account for their misdeeds so that these people take heed and if they wanted, they could reform themselves or at least be left with no excuse. I have already explained this subject in the third verse of Sūrah Tawbah. Those interested can look it up.

The words **وَمَا وَاهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ وَبِئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ** direct the Prophet (sws) to fully caution and remind these people that if they did not change their attitude, they should remember that Hell would be their abode which no doubt is the worst of all abodes.

**ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا امْرَأَةً نُوحٍ وَامْرَأَةً لُوطٍ كَانَتَا تَحْتَ عَبْدَيْنِ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا صَالِحَيْنِ فَخَانَتَاهُمَا فَلَمْ يُغْنِيَا عَنْهُمَا مِنَ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا وَقِيلَ ادْخُلَا النَّارَ مَعَ الدَّٰخِلِينَ (١٠)**<sup>19</sup>

Here at the end, examples are cited to show that what will benefit a person before God are his own deeds. Those who will not bring the treasure of good deeds with them to God will not be able to benefit from being related to the noblest of people.

The examples of the wives of Noah (sws) and Lot (sws) have been presented here as a general counsel for the addressees of this verse and thus the words: **ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا** (God cites the example of Noah's wife and Lot's wife to the disbelievers). These examples are related in a very general manner to the incidents concerning the pious wives of the Prophet (sws) mentioned at the beginning of the *sūrah*. It is not correct to construe that these examples have some special relation to those incidents. The greatest thing which contributed to the indifference of people, especially religious people, regarding accountability in the Hereafter was their wrong notion that since they were the descendents of the favoured ones of God, the fire of Hell would not touch them. The Jews and Christians were devastated because they were inflicted with this wrong notion, and now the Muslims were following their footsteps.

The word **خَانَ** (betrayal) is used for both women. It is very obvious that these ladies were not faithful to their husbands as far as being their

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19. God cites the example of Noah's wife and Lot's wife to the disbelievers. Both were married to two of Our righteous servants; then they betrayed them. So their husbands could in no way protect them from God and both women were told: Go you also and enter the Fire with those who enter it.

confidants was concerned; however, it does not necessarily mean that they were besmeared with profligacy and licentiousness. The Almighty protects His prophets from such filth. It is mentioned in narratives that the wife of Lot (sws) would inform the ruffians of his nation whenever he would receive guests. These misdeeds have been called acts of betrayal by the Qur'ān.

وَصَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا امْرَأَةٌ فِرْعَوْنَ إِذْ قَالَتْ رَبِّ ابْنِ لِي عِنْدَكَ بَيْتًا فِي الْجَنَّةِ وَنَجِّنِي مِنْ فِرْعَوْنَ وَعَمَلِهِ وَنَجِّنِي مِنَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ (١١)<sup>20</sup>

This example is meant to teach Muslims the fact that even in the worst of circumstances it is essential that they protect their faith. If in these circumstances a Muslim is living luxuriously, it is a requisite of his faith that if he feels that this atmosphere is detrimental to his faith and is a place of torment for him, he should protect his faith by bearing every hardship. Although the wife of the Pharaoh was the queen and lived in a palace she still prayed to God to grant her a house in Paradise, and to rid her of the Pharaoh and his evil and from his wicked people. It is obvious from this that she felt that she was living in place of torment because the whole environment was replete with sin and oppression. A believer, whether man or woman, should never breathe in satisfaction in such an environment even though he or she in these circumstances is living in a palace.

It is evident from the words وَنَجِّنِي مِنَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ that she was fully aware of the fact that if a person is living prosperously in an evil atmosphere and is not directly involved in the sins and accesses committed in it, even then he cannot protect himself from its foul effects. In order to be shielded from such effects, it is essential that he show abhorrence and detestation to them, and whenever possible he should run away from it.

وَمَرْيَمَ ابْنَتَ عِمْرَانَ الَّتِي أَحْصَنَتْ فَرْجَهَا فَنَفَخْنَا فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِنَا وَصَدَّقَتْ بِكَلِمَاتِ رَبِّهَا وَكُتِبَ عَلَيْهَا إِتْقَانُ الْإِسْلَامِ وَكَانَتْ مِنَ الْقَانِتِينَ (١٢)<sup>21</sup>

Here, at the end, the example of Mary (sws) is cited: although she was born in an evil environment, through sheer attention, devotion, hard-

20. And God cites the example of the Pharaoh's wife for the believers when she prayed: "Lord, build me a house with You in Paradise and deliver me from Pharaoh and his deeds and deliver me from a wicked nation."

21. And cites the example of Mary, 'Imrān's daughter, who preserved her chastity. Thus into her We breathed Our spirit and she attested the words of her Lord and His Books, and she was among the obedient.

work and worship she attained a unique status in the eyes of God.

At the time she was born, the Israelites were slaves to the Romans. The extent of moral decadence they had plunged into at that time can be seen from the extent to which John (sws) and later Jesus (sws) censured them. Moreover, the character displayed by the Israelites can also be gauged from the attitude they adopted with these two prophets and other righteous people. It was as a result of this attitude that the Almighty cursed them forever. It is in these decadent circumstances that Mary (sws) was born; she never received any support worthy of mention from her past, however, even in her childhood she greatly moved the prophet Zachariyya (sws), her maternal aunt's husband, when he would visit her in the Bayt al-Maqdis where she would be stationed for worship. He would be full of praise when he would feel her spiritual achievements. It was these achievements which impressed him so much that he prayed to God to bless him with such a son. Later, his prayer was accepted by God when he became father to the prophet John (sws).

Mary (sws) is an eternally living example that if a person is sincerely devoted to God, then even in the worst of circumstances, she can even make herself enviable for the angels. Thus the Almighty found her worthy of being entrusted with a great treasure, and in order to protect her honour from calumny and false allegations, He blessed her with such majesty which did not manifest itself for any other person of this world.

The words *الَّتِي أَحْصَتْ فَرْجَهَا فَنَفَخْنَا فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِنَا* refer to her real achievement because of which she proved herself worthy of being entrusted with a great thing from God. The word *فرج* is not used in Arabic in a limited meaning. It means "places of fear". It includes in it all those ways from which sin can infiltrate in a person. In the Qur'ān, this word is used for both men and women. The expression *أَحْصَتْ فَرْجَهَا* means that she completely guarded all parts of her body through which some sin could creep into it; the Almighty rewarded her for this by blowing His spirit into her, and in the form of Jesus (sws), a great sign of God emerged from her womb.

After a mention of this special characteristic of Mary (sws), the words *وَصَدَقَتْ بِكَلِمَاتِ رَبِّهَا وَكُتِبَ عَلَيْهَا مِنَ الْقَانِنِينَ* point to the blessings her faith reaped: she complied without any hesitation whatsoever with every directive the Almighty gave her; similarly, she also adhered to the teaching of divine scriptures. She would remember God at each instant because of which she was able to adhere to the directives of God with full attention even during the hardest of trials.

A point specially worth noting here is that examples of women have been cited not only in matters of virtue but also in those of vice. The purpose is to negate the notion that the fountainhead of all vices is a



woman. The truth of the matter is that as per her creation she too has good and bad abilities. If she does not use her freedom of will in the right manner, she can become the worst of companions to the best of people, and if she tastes the sweetness of faith and obedience, she is like a houri of Paradise in the most evil of environments.

By the grace of God, I come to the end of this *sūrah's tafsīr*. **فَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ** عَلَى فَضْلِهِ وَإِحْسَانِهِ (gratitude be to God for His blessings and favour).

Raḥmānābād,

6<sup>th</sup> June, 1978 AD

28<sup>th</sup> Jumadī al-Thānī, 1398 AH

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